DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 161 058 CS 204 440

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TITLE The Multiple Role of Oral Language Assessment: Language Status, Research, and Curriculum Development.
PUB DATE May 78
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (23rd, Houston, Texas, May 1-5, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education; Curriculum Development; *Educational Assessment; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); Language Maintenance; *Language Programs; *Language Tests; Multilingualism; Spanish Speaking
IDENTIFIERS *MAT SEA CAL Oral Proficiency Tests; *Oral Language

ABSTRACT

An oral language assessment test not only can determine the relative proficiency of a child in one or more languages and his or her language preference, but also can provide diagnostic information as to the child's strengths and weaknesses in each language. This information can serve as a guide to curriculum development and to prescriptive instruction in both oral language and reading. Also, data collected from such tests can become valuable resources for investigating language usage, language acquisition, and bilingualism. Full bilingual programs require an instrument providing assessment in both the home language and in English. Programs in Washington, Idaho, Texas, and California have used the MAT-SEA-CAL Oral Proficiency Tests as diagnostic instruments, as vehicles for improving curriculum design and development, and as aids in making decisions about children being considered for special education and language disability programs. A wide range of research projects that have provided validation for the MAT-SEA-CAL tests and are built on the information gathered from the tests have been conducted and are underway. (TJ)

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THE MULTIPLE ROLE OF ORAL LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT: LANGUAGE STATUS, RESEARCH, AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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Research Symposium
Oral Language Assessment, First and Second Language Acquisition and Reading in Spanish
Twenty-third Annual Convention International Reading Association
Houston, Texas
May 1-5, 1978

CS204440

The Multiple Role of Oral Language Assessment: Language Status, Research, and Curriculum Development

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The primary role of oral language assessment in recent years has been that of determining the language status of the child, i.e., relative proficiency in one or more languages as well as language preferences, these with the expressed purpose of adequate program planning and student placement. But a well-designed instrument can do all that and more. It can also provide diagnostic information as to the child's strengths and weaknesses in each of his languages that can serve as a guide to curriculum development and prescriptive instruction in both oral language and reading. And language data collected for the above purposes can become valuable resources for investigating the complex, multidimensional phenomena of language usage, language acquisition, and bilingualism. This paper describes some current projects in which language assessment is indeed serving this multiple function.

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The primary role of oral language assessment in recent years has been that of determining the language status of the child, i.e., relative proficiency in one or more languages as well as language preference, these with the expressed purpose of providing a guide for adequate program planning and student placement. But a well-designed instrument can do all that and more. It can also provide diagnostic information as to the child's strengths and weaknesses in each of his languages that can serve as a guide to curriculum development and prescriptive instruction in both oral language and reading. And language data collected for the above purposes can become valuable resources for investigating the complex, multidimensional phenomena of language usage, language acquisition, and bilingualism. We shall attempt to describe some current projects in which language assessment is indeed serving this multiple function.

Assessment instruments do not exist in a vacuum, rather they are usually constructed to meet certain specific program needs. The upsurge in the development of language assessment instruments began with the passage of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and picked up momentum with the landmark decision of Lau vs. Nichols in 1974 and the subsequent publication in 1975 by the Office for Civil Rights of HEW of a task force findings commonly referred to as the Lau Remedies. Both prior to and following the Lau Remedies document, various states

have passed and/or updated state laws on bilingual education. Several types of bilingual programs are in existence today, most of which are designed in order to meet either the Federal requirements or State requirements or both. We would like to focus on three main types of bilingual schooling in existence today and on the assessment requirements for each type.

I. Types of Bilingual Programs

1. Lau Remedies. The first of these, attempting to meet the requirements contained in guidelines suggested to school districts under the Lau Remedies, (a) requires only ESL programs for minimum compliance, (b) requires assessment only as to LESA/non-LESA, (c) recommends bilingual schooling, but does not require it, and (d) where bilingual schooling is implemented, does not specify whether it is to be of the transitional or the maintenance type.

2. State Laws. The second of these, following state guidelines (and we shall confine our comments to the Texas State Bilingual Education Act, passed in 1975 and further defined in 1978 by the Texas Education Agency's State Plan for Bilingual Education, which is roughly similar to many other states' bilingual education laws), (a) requires LESA/non-LESA assessment only, (b) requires transitional-type bilingual schooling, and (c) requires ESL instruction, but specifies that it be integrated into subject areas classes.

3. Full Bilingual Schooling. The third type, going beyond both Lau and State guidelines and attempting to provide full bilingual schooling, (a) promotes maintenance of the home language, (b) recommends

both ESL and formal instruction in the home language, (c) recommends the development of literacy skills in both languages.

II. Assessment Requirements. All of these programs require assessment measures that will aid in the placement of bilingual children in appropriate levels of instruction. Beyond this, though, there are important differences.

1. Lau. The programs under Lau require assessment measures that will (a) determine the child's English-language status only, (b) allow for a comparison with English-monolingual norms, although these may be local rather than national.

2. State. The State-supported programs also require assessment measures that (a) determine the child's English-language status only, but (b) leave unspecified the comparison with monolingual norms, thus permitting arbitrary decisions as to whether the comparison, if attempted, is to be with local or national norms.

3. Full Bilingual Programs. Programs attempting language maintenance and biliteracy require dual-language assessment instruments that will determine (a) the child's language dominance and relative proficiency in each of his languages, (b) the extent of his language development in each language, and that will (c) provide diagnostic information as to his areas of strengths and weaknesses in each language.

III. Full Bilingual Schooling. There are a number of school districts which have followed the latter of these designs. Of the ones we are familiar with, the Seattle School District and various districts

in the Yakima Valley in the State of Washington have had such programs for some years, and several school districts in Southern Idaho have recently started similar programs. One of the main concerns of this type of program is, of course, curriculum materials in the home language. Some of these districts have been developing such materials for some time now. The position was taken by these districts several years ago that they needed a diagnostic instrument that could identify the particular needs of the child, so that prescriptive instruction could be planned in both the home language and English. They elected to use the MAT-SEA-CAL Oral Proficiency Tests for this function.

IV. Diagnostic Assessment Instruments and Prescriptive Learning Materials.

1. The Instrument. The MAT-SEA-CAL Oral Proficiency tests, developed by Matluck and Mace-Matluck in 1973-74, are a series of comparable tests (designed for use in grades K-4) in English and five other languages, one of which, of course, was Spanish. These tests were extensively field-tested in Western Washington and Idaho, in California, and in Texas, with over 6,000 tests administered over a three-year period. About 2,000 bilingual children were tested with the instrument in English and Spanish in the above-mentioned areas. The various validation studies conducted during this field-test stage (Bell et al., 1977; Talbott, 1976; Doyle, 1976a, 1976b, 1976c; Matluck and Mace-Matluck, 1975, 1976, 1977b; Matluck, 1976, 1977a) have indicated high reliability and strong indications of validity, so that

numerous research projects have been undertaken using the test results and the in-process analysis as a data base.

The tests were designed as a diagnostic instrument and the significant grammatical structures of each language were placed, for scoring and analysis, into eight semantic categories which we considered to be the basic communication concepts that a child must handle (in any language) in order to perform in a school setting, i.e., the skills (a) of identifying, classifying, quantifying, interrogating, and negating, and (b) of showing important relationships such as spatial, case, and temporal.

The scoring procedure, designed specifically for diagnostic and planning purposes, provides for each child a profile of his ability to handle each of the semantic categories as well as his specific areas of strengths and weaknesses within each category.

2. Learning Packets. That a well-designed instrument can be a vehicle for improving curriculum design and development, in addition to its role in determining language status, is amply borne out, we believe, by three ongoing curriculum development projects in the Yakima Valley in Eastern Washington, in Southern Idaho, and in San Antonio, Texas. These projects were an outgrowth of a series of documents prepared by the authors of the MAT-SEA-CAL tests for these school districts which contained an analysis of the errors of their bilingual children on the Spanish and English tests. These errors were categorized in terms of the eight communication concepts (semantic categories), and an inventory of the language manifestations of each of the

grammatical structures causing difficulty was prepared for each child, each classroom, and each school district.

On the basis of a descending order in the frequency of errors by those children, these districts have been developing diagnostic-prescriptive learning packets in both Spanish and English designed to provide the teacher in a bilingual classroom with immediately available curriculum packets that address the particular language needs of the individual child, as determined by his diagnostic profile on the MAT-SEA-CAL. This enables the teacher to focus on the child's unique needs, rather than subjecting him to a global program of language instruction, much of which he may have no need for. The position is taken that the diagnostic capabilities of these tests are such that, if this type of instructional material is available to the classroom teacher, then only the child's identified areas of weakness in grammatical structure--and only those--can be selected for prescriptive treatment for that particular child (or for a group of children in need of the same kind of intervention).

Special teams of classroom teachers in each of these districts have been working for the past two years on developing and pilot-testing these learning packets. A series of packets have been developed in English by the Northside Independent School District in San Antonio and the Nampa and Caldwell School Districts in Southern Idaho, and the Yakima Valley Bilingual Project in Eastern Washington has developed and refined some 33 packets in Spanish to a point where they are now in the process of being published by the Resource Center in

Tacoma, Washington. In addition, the Yakima Valley Bilingual Project is developing packets for reading-skill development in which they are weaving into the oral packets guided reading exercises based on the oral skills acquired. These, in turn, are being cross-indexed to the reading program so that those structures of the directed reading reoccur in a new context and in connected reading.

Early indications are that these learning packets are serving, and will continue to serve, a very useful purpose in more efficiently and more effectively meeting the needs of bilingual children as they grow in developing capabilities in two languages.

V. Diagnostic Language Assessment Instruments and Student Placement in Special Programs. Dual language assessment instruments with appropriate diagnostic capabilities can also sometimes be useful to school counselors in making decisions about children being considered for special education and learning disability programs. Since such judgments are often made on the basis of the child's inability to perform in the English language, a good dual language assessment instrument can sometimes indicate, in the case of a bilingual child, the existence of a second-language problem. The MAT-SEA-CAL tests were used successfully on several such occasions in the Seattle School District.

VI. Diagnostic Language Assessment Instruments and Research. Finally, that language data from a well-designed assessment instrument can serve as resource data for many and varied aspects of language research is demonstrated, we believe, by a number of research projects

based on the MAT-SEA-CAL tests which have emerged during the various stages of their development.

1. During the Development phase many cultural, linguistic and psycho-linguistic differences among bilingual populations emerged. As a direct result of observations noted by the authors during this early stage, many linguistic and cultural factors involved in multilingual testing were reported by the authors in various papers presented at national and regional meetings of learned societies and in several articles in scholarly journals (Matluck, Mace-Matluck, 1975, 1976, 1977b; Matluck, 1976).

2. During the Analysis stage of the tests, one Master's thesis and four Ph.D. dissertations were completed, and three more are under way, all based directly on the in-process analysis of MAT-SEA-CAL test results from the various field-test sites. Dr. Brian Talbott's dissertation (1976) at the University of Idaho investigated the relationship between oral proficiency and school achievement. Dr. Vincent Doyle (1976a) completed a psychometric study on oral-proficiency-test reliability and validity, as a dissertation at the University of Idaho. Dr. Betty Mace-Matluck's (1977) dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin investigated the order of acquisition of English morphemes by bilingual speakers of four different language groups. Yun Ching Lee (1976) completed a Master's thesis at the University of Texas at Austin on an error analysis of the Mandarin spoken in the United States by bilingual Mandarin children. Dr. Rosalinda Barrera's dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin (1978) involved an

analysis of first- and second-language oral reading performance by native Spanish-speaking children in which she demonstrated that their spoken-language errors are reflected in their oral-reading errors in each of their languages.

3. As we enter the final validation stage in the development of the tests, there have already emerged at least five more studies as a direct outgrowth of the MAT-SEA-CAL test results: Dr. Doyle conducted two studies in 1976, one (1976b) on the developmental model for language assessment instruments, the other (1976c) a complete item analysis of the Spanish and English tests, and the authors (Matluck, Mace-Matluck, 1977b) reported finding a positive relationship between oral proficiency and reading achievement. The authors also did a pilot study error analysis in both Spanish and English (Matluck, 1978b) in which they established an order of difficulty of errors by bilingual children in grades K-2 classified by semantic category. Our data reduction system should shortly be providing us with this kind of data for 2,000 bilingual children across grades K-4. On the basis of this pilot study, we were able to classify these errors as either developmental or acquisitional in terms of first- and second-language learning (Matluck, 1978b). Evaluation studies of 1,000 Migrant children in nine regions of California is in its second year of testing by the California State Department of Education and another such study is being conducted by the Research Triangle Institute in a nationwide Migrant evaluation program in nineteen states. The results of these evaluation studies should be available in a very short time.

As the results come in during the 1978 field-testing of the Developmental Edition (Matluck, Mace-Matluck, 1977a), it is to be expected that several other research projects will be undertaken on the analysis of the new data. Three such projects are now in progress: (1) a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Houston by Angelina Cuellar which is investigating the predictability of reading achievement on the basis of scores on two different diagnostic oral proficiency measures; (2) a Master's thesis at Central Washington State College at Ellensburg, Washington by Jan Esquivel who is designing prescriptive curriculum packets containing creative children's stories, with the purpose of exposing the child to hearing the written forms of the language before attempting to read them; and (3) a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin by Leopoldo Coronado on the effects of differing degrees of bilingualism on the cognitive performance of Spanish-English bilinguals.

In sum, then, we have tried to demonstrate that a good, carefully designed language assessment instrument can indeed serve in a multiple role in language analysis and development, but we firmly believe that this cannot be achieved (1) by "quickie" tests, (2) by tests that do not tape the child's responses, nor (3) by tests which merely determine language dominance. On the other hand, the taped material from the kind of instruments we have described can be stored and catalogued into permanent multilingual tape archives which can serve as research data for years, and can be made available to future students in the

field of language study and education. Such an archive is currently being assembled at the University of Texas. Some of the specific areas of research that we believe could be pursued with these first-hand materials are as follows: comparative phonological studies, comparative grammatical studies, dialect studies (particularly in Spanish and Cantonese), native-language influence on the spoken English of bilinguals, interrelationship of oral-language proficiency and reading achievement, studies in language acquisition and language development, crosscultural studies, and longitudinal studies using the present tapes as baseline data.

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